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Submission to Chakrabarti commission on party rules

In considering the alleged problem of systemic institutional antisemitism in the Labour Party there are a number of points to consider

1. The Labour Party exists in a society that that is disfigured by all manner of discriminatory beliefs and behaviours. Consequently it cannot be asserted that the Party is free of antisemitism any more than: homophobia, Islamophobia, anti-Black racism, sexism, disableism etc. This does not suggest that antisemitism is a particular problem in the Party above and beyond other areas of concern. In society generally islamophobia is legitimised through the 'War on Terrorism' in a way that antisemitism is not condoned. The Party, though its acquiescence to the Prevent and counter-terrorism agendas is institutionally part of this problem.
2. Antisemitism has to be seen in the context of racism. The EUMC draft working (but not ratified) definition of antisemitism places it in the context of Israel and it is this inadequate definition that has been employed by many of those currently raising concerns.
3. It is being alleged that anti-Zionist comments are of themselves antisemitic. This is a category confusion. Jews are a religious group and attacks on them as Jews is an attack on their personhood. Zionism is a political ideology and as such is not immune from criticism, even fierce criticism, like any other political ideology. It has only been a mainstream ideology among Jews since the holocaust and so is not inherent to Judaism but is historically and politically contingent. There are many non-Zionist and anti-Zionist Jews of whom I am one.
4. The Jewish Labour Movement is claiming a special status in this matter. They are obviously welcome to contribute like anyone else but not to be given the particular role that they claim and Janet Royall's report sought to give them. The JLM is the UK affiliate of the Israel Labour Party, a Party that throughout its terms of office since 1967 has promoted the illegal settlement programme. Isaac Herzog, the current leader of the ILP - in its current guise of the Zionist Union - has been seeking to join Netanyahu's ruling coalition. Although this attempt has been unsuccessful it indicates how much shared responsibility the ILP has for the continuing assault on Palestinian rights by successive Israeli Governments. The JLM is also affiliated to the World Zionist Organisation which has been identified by the United Nations as a major conduit of funds to the illegal settlements.
5. As an avowedly Zionist organisation, it is not open for non- and anti-Zionist Jews to join it and thus they are denied a formal voice in the current discussions. Because of its partisan stance on Zionism and its advocacy role in pursuing current allegations it is not a suitable impartial provider of training for Labour Party branches and organisations. Their unsuitability is further illustrated by their response to the Party dismissing the charges against Jackie Walker. Rather than accepting that they had made claims that were determined to be unfounded they instead attacked those making the judgement of antisemitism because they had failed to endorse the JLM's views.
6. In seeking a definition of antisemitism one does not need to go beyond Oxford University scholar Brian Klug's succinct one. "Antisemitism is a form of hostility to Jews as 'Jews', where Jews are perceived as something other than what they are." For a body to be regarded as institutionally antisemitic its practices

must incorporate such misperceptions and must be visible through a consistent pattern of action. This could be by such behaviour as only approaching Jewish members for donations by assuming that the stereo type of the rich Jew is correct or by acting as though all Jews have more loyalty to Israel than to their own country.

7. It may be true that on isolated occasions members of the Labour Party make deliberately antisemitic statements, either directly or smuggled in under a deformed anti-Zionism. Such cases are easy to recognise they refer to too familiar stereotypes and fabrications and must be dealt with severely like any other racist abuse.
8. Slightly more often, but still uncommonly, individuals are confused by Israel's and its supporters' conflation of Israel with all Jews; and consequentially hold Jews as a collective and as individuals responsible for Israel's crimes. Such misapprehensions are precisely that, misapprehensions not expressions of a vile antisemitism. They must be dealt with through education. Such an educative process will be aided by clarity by the Party of its opposition to state crimes by Israel, as with crimes by other states, and, in making such denunciations, distinguishing between Jews and Zionists and Israel.
9. The pressure to use a simplistic reading of MacPherson's principles is misleading. Macpherson was writing in the specific context of the Metropolitan Police at the end of the last century where he uncovered a systemic refusal of the police to acknowledge even blatant examples of racist behaviour and violence and investigate them. He therefore enjoined the police to acknowledge the perceptions of victims and investigate accordingly. It was a guide to police behaviour in investigating not to judges in adjudicating on the outcomes of those investigations. There is pressure from the JLM and its allies for perception to stand in the place of adjudication and for perception to be sufficient to determine the existence of antisemitic behaviour.
10. The rule changes proposed by the JLM seek to encode this false interpretation of MacPherson into the Labour Party rule book but they go even further. One of their changes would seek to limit Chapter 2 Clause 1 (8) "The NCC shall not have regard to the mere holding or expression of beliefs and opinions" to read "The NCC shall not have regard to the mere holding or expression of beliefs and opinions *except in instances involving antisemitism, Islamophobia or racism*". They thus want to introduce thought crime into the Labour Party rules. This is clearly unacceptable on any number of grounds and illustrates the ill thought out and capricious nature on the assault on the free expression of thoughts and opinions on a matter as controversial as Palestine/Israel.
11. Perversely the JLM could be seen as being more antisemitic than many of those it denounces because of its insistence that there is only one sort of 'real Jew': the sort of Jew that agrees with them in supporting a Zionist view of the world. Such a view reduces the diversity of Jews in Britain, who are heterogeneous - holding a wide variety of views on Palestine and Israel as they do on all other issues, to a single stereotype. Such stereotypes lie at the base of antisemitism just as other stereotypes afford other forms of racism.